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ABSTRACT

Three sets of goals useful for assessing student competencies in speaking and listening are reviewed in this paper. The first instrument examined, derived from a report of that Speech Communication Association's National Project on Speech Communication Competencies for all grades, lists (1) five assumptions concerning the nature of communication competence, (2) four principal features that control the actual performance of language in a social context, and (3) five categories of communication functions: controlling, feeling, informing, ritualizing, and imagining, with possible activities listed in all categories. The second instrument described--the Michigan State Department of Education's plan for measuring minimum speaking and listening skills in the fourth, seventh, and tenth grades--has objectives grouped under the categories of basic principles of conversation, group discussions, creative activities, public speaking, and critical listening. The third system described, designed by the Speech Communication Association's Task Force on Defining Speech Communication Competencies for High School Graduates, lists 22 competencies in the categories of communication codes, oral message evaluation, basic oral skills, and human relations. (MKM)

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Measuring Communication Competency

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The concept of competency based education challenges educators today. This renewed interest in the quality of the end result of the process of education poses new and challenging questions for everyone involved. Specifically, the speech communication teacher needs to look at the various goals that will be used to assess their students' speaking and listening skills. Three such approaches will be reviewed here with comment on how these may be utilized most effectively.

The instruments to be examined include portions of a report of the Speech Communication Association's National Project on Speech Communication Competencies for all grades,[1] the State Department of Education's plan for measuring minimum speaking and listening skills designed for fourth, seventh, and tenth grades,[2] and a system designed by the Speech Communication Association's Task Force on Defining Speech Communication Competencies for High School Graduates.[3]

National Project For All Grades

The information resulting from the National Project on Speech Communication Competencies offers an excellent background for understanding the nature of communication competence and some resulting implications for curriculum and the classroom. Five basic assumptions were arrived at concerning the nature of communication instruction. The

assumptions and explanations are:

1. Communication educators are primarily interested in the pragmatics of communication.

The effective use of language is the focus of speech communication teachers. How a child is socialized by and is a socializing agent through communication becomes the focus of the development of that child. How the language is used is stressed in terms of the acquisition of rules, norms, and conventions of using that language as well as syntax, semantics, and sound production. With this change in emphasis, the child is seen as a developing message strategist. The message becomes the focus for the varying situations that human communication requires.

2. Communication competency is not tied to competency in a particular form of language.

Regardless of the form of language(i.e. standard English) children must acquire like skills for communicating. All children have a need to develop functional communication competencies which are not tied to dialect or any possible non-standard language usage. The fidelity of message exchange is a major concern.

3. The communication behaviors of children can be modified.

This statement makes clear the importance of instruction-

al intervention in the development of the child's communication skills. The challenge to the educator is to assist the child in this development.

4. As communication educators, we should be child-centered in our educational prescriptions.

Indicting the "adult-centered" communication courses (i.e. public speaking), the conferees feel communication educators need to better address their efforts to the needs of the child. Children need to be assisted in becoming better at communicating in the situations they find themselves. This expanded definition of speech communication includes home, street, and school circumstances.

5. Communication instruction should emphasize the interactive nature of communication.

Every communication situation situation is viewed as an interaction with the participants bringing with them certain expectations or intentions. Understanding these expectations or intentions is crutial to effective communicative acts and helps to develop a "sense of appropriateness" in our communication. The listener becomes an equal partner in the interaction; both listener and speaker are the participants.[4]

Given these five assumptions concerning the nature of communication competence, the report suggests four principal features which tie the actual performance of language in a

social context. These principal features defining competence include: (1) the exercise of competence depends upon an available repertoire of experiences; (2) it requires that the individual make critical choices from that repertoire; (3) it is revealed when suitable behaviors are brought to bear in performing desirable tasks; and (4) it is sustained when individuals are able to evaluate their performance behaviors objectively - thereby enriching their repertoires of experiences.[5] Further explanation of these principal features follow:

1. Building a Repertoire of Experiences

It is important to assist the child in the development of communication strategies required by their social environment. To be flexible communicators, children must become proficient in a variety of communication settings.

2. Selecting Strategies

Within any given communication situation, strategies need to be selected depending on the nature of that situation. Communication instruction needs to include assistance in the selection process of appropriate communication strategies.

3. Implementing Strategies

Once the most effective strategies have been chosen, the child should be able to carry that strategy out. Experiences need to be given where the child is encouraged to experiment with a variety of communication strategies.

4. Evaluating Performances

> After the chosen strategy has been executed, children need to take a critical look at how effective that effort has been. In order to facilitate growth in future communication encounters, time must be given to the evaluation process.

These four principal features of communication competence can work for the teacher as a focus for the development of a plan of instruction. As a framework, the plan of instruction takes on a complete, directed nature.

Equally as helpful in the development of that directed plan of instruction are the following categories. These categories were selected by the participants in the Synthesis Conference identifying five large families of communication functions which define the major uses of communication. These categories include (1) controlling, (2) feeling, (3) informing, (4) ritualizing, and (5) imagining.[6] (See Table I for a suggested list of acts related to the functions.)

Communication acts of controlling included here are those in which the primary purpose of the communicant is to control. Spontaneous acts expressing feelings and attitudes constitute the feeling function. Informing acts are such as questioning, answering, naming, and explaining. The purpose of the participant is to offer or seek information. Reciting, taking turns in conversation, greeting, and leave taking are all examples of the communication behaviors included in ritualizing.

TABLE I

COMMUNICATION ACTS RELATED TO THE FIVE COMMUNICATION FUNCTIONS

Controlling	Feeling	Informing	Ritualizing	Imagining
commanding	exclaiming	stating information	greeting	role-playing
offering	taunting	questioning	taking leave	fantasizing
suggesting	commiserating	answering	verbal gaming	speculating
permitting	tale-telling	justifying	reciting	dramatizing
threatening	blaming	naming	taking turns in conversations	theorizing
warning		pointing out an object	culturally appropriate speech modes	story-telling
prohibiting		demonstrating	culturally appropriate amenities	
contradicting		explaining		
refusing		acknowledging		
bargaining				

These acts serve to maintain social relationships and make social interaction possible. Storytelling, dramatizing, role-playing, and fantasizing are a few of the communicative acts which have the participant involved in imagining.

When the teacher understands the basic assumptions, the framework of the principal features of communication in the social context, and the five families of communication functions, what can be done? For one thing, the information provided can give the communication educator a directed understanding of the nature of communication competence. With this philosophical base, more focused programs of communication can result. The Speech Communication Association's Project Report is theoretically sound. The intactness of the statement helps in establishing and explaining curriculum goals as well as classroom efforts to school administrators. This accountability function further serves to strengthen the total school speech communication program.

Another impact this report has for teaching choices is in its recognition of the total scope of speech acts. Speech communication educators need to assist their students in becoming more competent in dyadic communication settings as well as in public speaking settings. Communication competencies are not situation bound. The function adapts to the situation in the same manner as the speaker adapts to the audience. Students need to become more competent communicators in all

of the circumstances they encounter such as with peers, parents, at school and on the job. To develop a broad base, each student needs to participate in a variety of situations in the class. The SCA approach probably necessitates an activity based class.

Michigan's Minimum Tenth Grade Competencies

The Michigan State Department of Education offers the second measuring device for specified speaking and listening objectives. This tool is to be used for grades one through nine. It is offered as a guideline to inform educators of the minimum speaking and listening skills for which children in the fourth, seventh, and tenth grades will be tested. In each of the grade level groupings, five headings appear under the skill column. Each grade level grouping lists a column of specific behaviors that by the end of that particular grade, the student is expected to be able to do. (See Table II for a complete list of the most current statement.) Listed and summarized from this author's perspective, the minimum speaking and listening competencies for students at the end of ninth grade are:

I. Basic Principles of Conversation

The student will speak and listen in a conversational setting with another individual or small group of individuals and will be able to analyze an observed conversation.

TABLE II

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION MINIMAL SPEAKING/LISTENING OBJECTIVES FOR GRADES 7-9

I. Basic Principles of Conversation	II. Group Discussions	III. Creative Activities	IV. Public Speaking	V. Critical Listening
A. Take part in a conversation with another individual or small group of individuals; i.e. will speak and listen.	A. Take part in a group discussion, when the discussion leader presents open-ended discussion questions.	A. Participate both verbally and/or non-verbally in creative dramatic activities.	A. Make a brief presentation to a small group or a class on a topic of the student's choice.	A. Identify the main idea of an oral presentation of appropriate length.
B. Analyze an observed conversation.	B. Express her/his own attitudes, values and feelings within a group discussion.	B. Present a pantomime to the class or to a small group non-verbally describing an event, object, emotion, or person.	B. Analyze a video tape or movie of a spoken presentation, both from the standpoint of verbal and non-verbal aspects.	B. Identify the most appropriate summary of a selection presented orally.
	C. Listen to another person tell something and then orally tell a third person what was expressed.	C. Take part either verbally or non-verbally in a class or group play, program, skit, etc.		C. Identify the purpose of an oral presentation.

TABLE II - PAGE 2

I. Basic Principles of Conversation	II. Group Discussions	III. Creative Activities	IV. Public Speaking	V. Critical Listening
		D. Analyze an observed dramatics activity.		D. Recall information presented orally.
		E. Take part in role playing activities when the role playing calls for such communication acts, such as the following: Controlling, Feeling, etc.		E. Identify cause and effect relationships within an oral presentation.
				F. Identify appropriate inferences about either the presenter herself/himself or persons described by a presenter.

TABLE II - PAGE 3

I. Basic Principles of Conversation	II. Group Discussions	III. Creative Activities	IV. Public Speaking	V. Critical Listening
				G. Identify differences between fact and opinion in an oral presentation. H. Identify/describe the main story line or sequence of events of a story or event presented orally.

II. Group Discussions

Having been presented with an open ended discussion question by a discussion leader, the student will take part in a group discussion expressing attitudes, values, and feelings. Having listened to another person tell something, the student will orally tell a third person what was expressed.

III. Creative Activities

Participation verbally and/or non-verbally in creative dramatics activities which could include a class or group play, program or skit is expected as well as the analysis of such an activity. Also, the student will present a pantomime to the class or small group non-verbally describing an event, object, emotion, or person. The five communication acts of controlling, feeling, informing, ritualizing, and imagining are to be utilized in role-playing activities.

IV. Public Speaking

In this area, the student will be expected to make a brief presentation on the topic of his or her own choice and analyze a video tape or movie of a spoken presentation or a "live presentation" in terms of verbal and non-verbal aspects.

V. Critical Listening

Identifying the main idea, the most appropriate summary, purpose, and cause and effect relationships are to be mastered by the student. Also, it is expected that the student will be able to recall information presented orally as well as identify inferences about the presenter or the person or persons described by the presenter. Finally, the student will be able to identify and describe the story line or sequence of events of a story or event presented orally.

In the publication from the State Department, a third column titled "Possible Measurement Techniques" suggests ways in which each speaking and listening behavior may be evaluated. They are listed to clarify the objectives, not to serve as models for any particular grade level. The measurement technique suggested for conversational abilities (A) as listed above would have the evaluator using an observation form judging to what extent the child contributed, listener, facilitated, and enjoyed the conversation. It is suggested that each child be observed and evaluated after several observations in a variety of settings. (Table III gives a possible form that might be used.)

Of the three approaches, this instrument of measurement will have the most direct and far reaching effect on classroom choices made by the teacher. This device or one very

TABLE III

POSSIBLE CONVERSATIONAL EVALUATION SHEET

DID THE STUDENT:	(circle one)	
1) Contribute three or more times	Yes	No
2) When listening to the other person have consistent eye contact	Yes	No
3) Select messages which were consistent with the topics of conversation	Yes	No
4) Finish the conversation in an effective fashion	Yes	No
Student is competent if three of four "Yes" answers are achieved	Yes	No

similar to it is to be used in the measurement of Michigan students' speaking and listening skills. The very fact that it is this mechanism that states the framework for competent students in the speech communication area makes those of us involved in that process take serious notice. Being performance oriented, it should be welcomed by anyone already comfortable with this instructional approach. Another advantage of the State Department of Education's design is that it should be easily understood by administrators and parents. The exactness of language and uncomplex vocabulary should lead to a more universal understanding of what it is we are trying to have our students accomplish.

SCA Minimal High School Graduate Competencies

The final approach to competency that will be discussed is the result of the Speech Communication Task Force on Defining Speech Communication Competencies for High School Graduates. This device in its preliminary report lists twenty-two competencies for the twelfth grade students in the categories of (I) Communication Codes, (II) Oral Message Evaluation, (III) Basic Oral Skills, and (IV) Human Relations.

I. Communication Codes

These skills deal with minimal expectations in speaking and understanding spoken English. Nonverbal sign such as

the effective use and interpretation of gestures and facial expressions is also included.

II. Oral Message Evaluation

The competencies in this area include the use of standards of appraisal to make judgments concerning messages or the effect of the message. Distinguishing facts from opinions, informative from persuasive messages, and being able to recognize when another does not understand your message appear in this category.

III. Basic Oral Skills

The selection and arrangement of message elements are the skills outlined in the category. The student needs to be able to express ideas clearly and concisely and be able to ask and answer questions to obtain and give information in an effective manner.

IV. Human Relations

This set of skills can be used in the building and maintenance of personal relationships. Listening, expression of opinions and being able to describe another's viewpoint are among the skills required here. Times of emotional stress and conflict are addressed as well with the expectation that students will be able to discuss differences in opinion ade-

quately. (For a complete listing of the competencies, refer to Table IV.)

For each competency listed there are three application examples listed under columns named occupational, citizenship, and maintenance. These three areas suggest that people work, participate in government, and maintain relationships in all their endeavors. An example using one application to illustrate the device follows:

IV. Human Relations

E. Performs social rituals appropriately.

Occupational: Introduce yourself at the beginning of a job interview.

Citizenship: Introduce a motion at a public meeting.

Maintenance: Make small talk in casual social settings.

A complete example of one specific competency with all nine applications can be found on Table V.

By using this tool of measurement, the speech communication teacher is given the competencies with nine examples for each competency listed. These examples give this effort its greatest strength. Ideas for possible lesson plans can come from the listed examples. The use of this device would be questionable if all the application examples had to be measured. This device could work to limit the teacher in presenting the kind of instruction that best fits him or herself

TABLE IV

SPEECH COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION TASK FORCE MINIMAL SPEAKING AND LISTENING COMPETENCIES

FOR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES

I. Communication Codes	II. Oral Message Evaluation	III. Basic Oral Skills	IV. Human Relations
A. Listen effectively to oral English.	A. Identify main ideas in messages.	A. Express ideas clearly and concisely.	A. Listen courteously.
B. Decode nonverbal messages accurately.	B. Distinguish fact from opinion.	B. Express and defend with evidence your point of view.	B. Describe another's viewpoint.
C. Use words, pronunciation and grammar appropriate for situation.	C. Distinguish between informative and persuasive messages.	C. Organize messages so that others can understand them.	C. Discuss differences of opinion.
D. Use nonverbal signs appropriate for situations.	D. Identify biases in messages.	D. Ask questions to obtain information.	D. Express feelings to others appropriately.
E. Use voice effectively.	E. Recognize when another does not understand your message.	E. Answer questions effectively.	E. Perform social rituals appropriately.
		F. Give concise and accurate directions.	
		G. Summarize messages.	

TABLE V

SAMPLE SPEECH COMMUNICATION TASK FORCE COMPETENCY WITH APPLICATION EXAMPLES

Competency	Application Examples		
III. Basic Oral Skills	Occupational	Citizenship	Maintenance
B. Express and defend with evidence your point of view.	Express and defend your view in a union meeting.	Express and defend your view in a political discussion.	Express and defend your refusal to accept products or services you didn't order.
	Express and defend your suggestions for change in job conditions.	Express and defend your innocence in court.	Express and defend your faith or relition.
	Express and defend your reasons for job absence to your supervisor.	Express and defend your position in a city council meeting.	Express and defend your feelings in a family discussion.

and the specific needs of the students. This device does give its user an organizing structure for the speech process in four broad competency areas as well as integrates societal demands. By recognizing the practical need for speech communication competencies for occupational, citizenship, and maintenance reasons, the scope of the job of speech education becomes more clearly defined.

A Final Perspective

Taking these three competency guides, what must be done? By taking one or all of these structures as your guide, assess what competencies you perceive your classroom efforts to be addressing itself to. Once discovered, continue stressing those skills you perceive to be important. Try to structure your program to incorporate a greater number of the competencies.

Another more challenging question must be answered. If minimal speaking and listening objectives are to be met, what type of curriculum will most effectively accomplish this? All educators should strive to make their students more effective communicators. But on whose shoulders does the primary responsibility rest? Right. The teacher of speech communication, debate, oral interpretation, and theater. An example should illuminate the point.

High school "A" has an enrollment of 500 students. All of the students are offered a Speech course as an elective for credit toward graduation. Over a four year period it was found that only 150 students took the elective Speech course. No other Speech related courses were offered at the school. What competencies are expected of the 350 students who did not take the Speech class? Are the 150 who took Speech expected to reach competency levels in all the skills? Are the competencies reached at the elementary, junior high, or high school level? The need for a comprehensive K-12 curriculum outlining grade level expectations for all students seems to be the most logical and practical solution.

The reality of competency based speech communication education is a challenge to those of us involved. We need to be aware of the direction this renewed interest in quality education will take our speech programs. By utilizing these devices for communication competency measurement, we can remain on top of effective individual programs that help students become more skillful in their communication.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Allen, R.R., Brown, Kenneth L. (Ed.). Developing Communication Competence in Children, Skokie, Ill.: National Textbook Co., 1976.

[2]State Department of Education, "Speaking and Listening Objectives", (Lansing, Mi., February 1977).

[3]"Speech Communication Association Task Force on Defining Speech Communication Competencies for High School Graduates: Preliminary Report", Speech Communication Association (Falls Church, Va.; December 1977).

[4]Ibid., pp. 246-248.

[5]Ibid., pp. 248-250.

[6]Ibid., pp. 251-252.